REFLECTING A QUEER REALITY: UNDERSTANDING BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER RESPONSES TO MAINSTREAM LGBT ADVERTISEMENTS

by

JORDAN BLACKBURN

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Advertising
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 2019

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Jordan Blackburn for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Advertising to be taken June 2019

Title: Reflecting a Queer Reality: Understanding Bisexual and Transgender Responses
to Mainstream LGBT Advertisements

Approved: _____

Kim Sheehan

Beginning in the 1990s, mainstream brands began to target in earnest what is known as the "gay market," by actively and publicly advertising to LGBT consumers. The practice continues today, but such advertisements largely exclude bisexual and transgender individuals. This study seeks to understand if modern mainstream advertisements are able to effectively persuade LGBT audiences that are not cisgender gays or lesbians through a series of one-on-one interviews with college-aged lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender participants. Results indicate that modern mainstream LGBT advertisements are not effective for participants of any gender or sexual orientation. Additionally, participants expressed greater desire for action on the part of the brands in the form of support of LGBT advertisements (sometimes known as "gay friendliness" of a brand) as well as increased normalization of LGBT individuals in advertisements. Such work creates a foundation that can give specific recommendations to help brands target LGBT consumers more ethically and effectively.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Kim Sheehan and other names thereafter, for everything they've done to help me make work that I can truly be proud of and understand this topic on a deeper level than I ever thought possible. My most heartfelt thanks to Kim for guiding me through this process and serving as my primary advisor and to Professor Chris Chavez and Professor Louise Bishop for so graciously agreeing to serve on my committee. I'd also like to thank my mom and dad, who made this whole thing possible, Kate for providing untold amounts of emotional and technical support during the writing process of this thesis, Haydn for letting me text them novels about every interesting thing I learned while researching, Emma for constantly inspiring me to be the best version of myself, and anybody and everybody who helped me find participants, listened to me go on for hours about my topic, or so kindly asked me "What are you working on? Thesis stuff?"

Table of Contents

List of Accompanying Materials

1. A best practices guide for advertising practitioners hoping to target college-aged LGBT individuals

List of Tables

Introduction

Many of the critiques leveled against the "gay market" rely on the idea that corporations have long attempted to define what it means to be gay through the images created and promoted in advertising (Chasin 2001). Some scholars have argued that because advertising can be said to create culture through the creation of difference, then brands and advertisers are on some level responsible for the creation of gay identity itself (Chasin 2001). The relationship between the LGBT community and brands can be seen as inextricably tied, much in the way that no social identity can truly be freed from capitalist society. And yet research into gay consumer responses to LGBT advertising is relatively sparse. Prior work has attempted to determine not only whether LGBT audiences are effectively targeted by LGBT advertisements, but also whether such advertisements alienate heterosexual consumers (Oakenfull and Greenlee 2005; Um 2014; Um 2016). Other research has examined the advertisements themselves, attempting to determine exactly what messages these ads are conveying to heterosexual and LGBT consumers alike, either implicitly or explicitly (Kates 1999; Nölke 2017). But despite the fact that the acronym "LGBT" has become popular in recent years to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals as a cohesive identity group, research regarding the "gay market" has largely excluded bisexual and transgender individuals (Hollibaugh and Weiss 2015; Oakenfull 2013). Some textual analyses have examined depictions of bisexual and transgender individuals in advertisements, but all literature examining LGBT consumer responses to advertisements up to this point has centered entirely around lesbian and gay consumers (Gudelunas 2010; Nölke 2017; Oakenfull and Greenlee 2005; Oakenfull 2007; Oakenfull 2013; Tsai 2010; Tsai 2011;

Um 2016). This study seeks not only to gain a vital perspective on the effect that LGBT advertisements as a whole have on bisexual and transgender respondents, but also to make heard voices that have largely gone unacknowledged in scholarship surrounding LGBT advertising. As we move forward, this study will attempt to answer some of the questions that have been raised by the relative lack of bisexual and transgender individuals in scholarship surrounding LGBT individuals. In studying these topics, this study seeks to determine if modern mainstream advertisements are able to effectively persuade audiences that are not cisgender gays or lesbians.

Background

Market segmentation, the process of dividing consumers into different groups in order to advertise to them, assumes that different groups of consumers have different needs and thus must each be marketed to in their own unique way (Smith 1956). Nearly every professionally produced advertisement that exists in the world today was created with a specific audience in mind. Market segments such as mothers and video game fans may seem relatively uncontroversial, but brands have also targeted historically oppressed minority groups such as Latinx and LGBT individuals (Peñazola 1996). Targeting such a vulnerable population, even in good faith, necessarily leads to questions regarding the efficacy and ethics of doing so. This study focuses on mainstream LGBT advertisements, defined by Tsai (2011) as "ads made by mainstream advertisers and aired on network television, rather than those presented in gay-oriented media or produced by gay rights organizations or gay-owned businesses," (p. 86).

Brands have sought to target LGBT consumers for years, but have not used mainstream advertisements to do so until relatively recently. For much of the 20th century, advertisers targeted LGBT consumers in limited ways, and brands were unwilling to create campaigns that specifically and explicitly courted lesbian or gay consumers through mainstream channels (Branchick 2002). Largely due to a burgeoning gay press, the '70s and '80s saw an expansion of advertising campaigns aimed at lesbian and gay consumers from larger and more mainstream brands, but these ads remained confined to gay newspapers, magazines, and other outlets aimed exclusively at LGBT consumers (Branchick 2002). In the 1990s, a growing trend of marketing directly and explicitly to LGBT individuals truly began to emerge, beginning

with Swedish furniture store IKEA, which in 1994 was the first to air a mainstream television ad featuring two gay men (Branchik 2002; Chasin 2000; Gross 2001). Targeting LGBT consumers through mainstream channels rather than through gay-oriented media is appealing to brands because they have a much greater chance of attracting their target audience: while only a small percentage of lesbian and gay consumers consume gay media such as magazines or newspapers, nearly all LGBT individuals consume mainstream media (Oakenfull et al. 2005). Although it is difficult to measure the exact size of the LGBT market (made only more difficult by the fact that not all individuals who engage in homosexual activities identify as LGBT), estimates put LGBT individuals at anywhere between one and 10 percent of the total U.S. population, a significant target market (Lukenbill 1999).

Mainstream advertisements targeting LGBT consumers are frequently assigned political significance by both brands and consumers. Unlike some other market segments, LGBT individuals form a historically marginalized political group, one that has faced discrimination and institutional oppression since its formation as a recognizable identity group, and such historical marginalization can be seen as contributing to the formation of LGBT individuals as both a political group and a social identity (D'Emilio, 1983). As a result, the personal and political have historically been difficult to separate when discussing LGBT audiences (Sender 2004). Because of the close relationship between social and political identity, brands have frequently positioned consumption as not only an economic choice, but also a political one, equating purchasing from LGBT-friendly businesses as a form of political action, and in doing so, equating freedom of consumption with true political freedoms (Chasin 2000).

Scholars have argued that LGBT advertisements frequently push the idea that LGBT individuals are "just like you and me," by seeking to minimize the differences between LGBT consumers and heterosexual consumers with phrases like "love is love" even as these same advertisements emphasize difference in their choice to market to LGBT consumers as a separate market segment (Kates 1999; Sender 2004). Stephen Kates (1999) was one of the first scholars to highlight exactly how these ads can be read as creating difference even when they are ostensibly designed to promote similarity in his analysis of a Toyota ad that featured the copy "the family car." Alexandra Chasin (2000) and Katharine Sender (2004) both built upon this work. Chasin (2000) argued that prevalence of these themes implicitly promises that acceptance into the American mainstream can be achieved through means of consumption, effectively politicizing brand loyalty. Sender (2004) argued that in order to create advertisements that target a particular identity group, one must first assume that there is an inherent difference between this group and other identity groups. Modern identity politics, formed and shaped by capitalism, have led the gay rights movement to move into a pro-capitalist assimilation, where the goal of the movement seems to be freedom of choice which is further conflated with freedom to make *economic* choices (Chasin 2000).

The messages that advertisers and marketers promote have tangible impacts on LGBT communities. Much in the way that D'Emilio (1983) argued that gays and lesbians were originally united as a coherent identity group through oppression, Chasin (2000) assigned similar significance to advertisements, arguing that because advertisements have long defined culture, in hailing particular groups (and in particular LGBT consumers), advertisements have the power to shape the way that individuals

identify. Lesbians and gay men have long been represented by both brands and marketers as an especially desirable market segment due to their assumed greater collective income and their status as "double income, no kids" (DINK) households (Lukenbill 1999). Such representations are largely untrue of the LGBT community as a whole, and in fact are potentially harmful because they have historically been used to falsely imply that LGBT individuals are overall financially better off than much of the country, indicating that they do not experience oppression and are thus not in need of special protections (Hollibaugh and Weiss 2015; Lukenbill, 1999). LGBT consumers are acutely aware of the ways in which brands mischaracterize LGBT consumers, but prior scholarship suggests that even when consumers realize that LGBT advertisements are promoting an inaccurate view of the LGBT community, those same consumers still gain empowerment by internalizing such representations, rationalizing them as empowering and as evidence of growing social acceptance, and ultimately reading them as signifiers of social power (Tsai 2011). Participants in Tsai's study expressed that "the importance of targeted advertising as validation of the gay community significantly outweighed the troubling aspects of marketing," and past research has indicated that gay individuals are effectively targeted by advertising featuring gay content (Tsai 2011, p. 91; Oakenfull 2005).

Literature Review

The LGBT Market

Significant research has attempted to discern the actual buying power of the gay market, and assumed buying power of the gay market has been offered as not only a reason that marketers may choose to target the market, but also as rationale for studying the market itself (Badgett 2001; Lukenbill 1999; Oakenfull 2007; Um et al. 2013; Um 2016). Some estimates have placed the buying power of the market at $450 billion, while other studies noted that gay and lesbian consumers are frequently assumed to have a greater than average income overall, mostly due to the fact that gay men and lesbians are presumed to be less likely to have children and thus to have greater disposable income (Branchick 2001; Lukenbill 1999; Oakenfull 2005). Such attempts to define the buying power of a marginalized group are common when attempting to justify targeting a marginalized group despite fear of social backlash. In 1966, the United States Department of Commerce released a pamphlet entitled "A Guide to Negro Marketing Information," (1966) which conspicuously points out that the African-American market at the time was worth $27 billion. This representation of LGBT consumers as a desirable, valuable market segment could be seen as an important step forward in gaining acceptance for the LGBT community overall, because "in a capitalist society, market incorporation is of the utmost importance because it summons a social legitimation approaching that of citizen," (Peñazola 1996, p. 33).

Yet numerous in-depth analyses have revealed that as a group, LGBT consumers are no more likely to have a higher income than straight consumers, and actually may

be more likely to have a lower income (Branchick 2001; Hollibaugh and Weiss 2015; Lukenbill 1999). Grant Lukenbill's *Untold Millions* (1999) was the first to conduct a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of claims made by LGBT publications and marketing firms about the size and income of the gay market. Lukenbill's analysis effectively disputed the idea that LGBT consumers as a whole make more money and explained that there is no truly accurate or effective way to measure the size of the gay market and that many previous estimates, especially those done by marketing firms, were likely inaccurate (Lukenbill 1999). M.V. Lee Badgett built upon Lukenbill's (1999) work in his book *Money, Myths, and Change* (2001), validating many of Lukenbill's claims and questioning some of Lukenbill's conclusions, primarily Lukenbill's assumption that LGBT consumers are likely to follow any particular behavior pattern or that they are more loyal to brands in general. Badgett (2001) deconstructed several myths regarding the gay market. He addresses the ideas that lesbians and gay men represent some sort of elite social group, that they all match the "double income, no kids" (DINK) model, that gay individuals are protected from discrimination because they can choose not to disclose their LGBT identity, and that gay consumers are more interested in consuming upscale products than other groups (Badgett 2001). Hollibaugh and Weiss also demonstrated that LGBT consumers as a whole are significantly more vulnerable to poverty and other forms of economic injustice: both single LGBT individuals and LGBT households are much more likely to live in poverty than straight households, and "transgender people are four times more likely than the general population to live in poverty," (2015, p. 21). In *Business, Not Politics* (2004), Sender warned of the dangers of promoting idealized versions of gay consumers. Such representations may cause

straight consumers to have a slightly more favorable view of LGBT consumers but obscure the fact that many LGBT consumers still experience poverty and oppression, making it more difficult for those issues to be discussed openly (2004).

The Texts of Advertising

Since the 1990s, authors have engaged in detailed textual analyses of advertisements that help to explain the way that LGBT advertisements function. Through a mixture of historical and textual analysis of existing advertisements, Alexandra Chasin deconstructed the ways in which nonwhite and nonmale LGBT individuals are excluded from these types of advertisements (Chasin 2000). LGBT advertisements have long conflated purchasing power (and purchasing of specific commodities) with political action, equating the social movement with the lifestyle while actively excluding nonwhite gay bodies, and instead focusing on a stereotypical image of the fit, white gay man as a sort of one-size-fits-all approach to targeting the LGBT community (Chasin 2000). Symbols such as the Pride flag and the pink triangle that may be recognized as more broadly inclusive create a kind of "gay nationalism," securing the identity of gays in such advertisements as both gays and Americans, and once again implying that consumption can be a political action (2000, p. 120). And yet despite the fact that such advertisements are commonplace, recurring themes do not mean that advertisements all must be read in the same way. Kates (1999) found that "queer deconstructions" of advertisements help to identify ways in which the ad may be read or misread by individuals, noting that "idealized images of gay men are not accepted without question for all gay consumers" (1999 p. 35). Scholarship surrounding LGBT advertisements has placed a focus on the way that gay men and women are

represented in advertisements, with significantly less focus on the ways in which

bisexual and transgender respondents view such advertisements. Textual analysis has

long formed the backbone of understanding how and why advertisements aimed at these

audiences function and are a useful tool in understanding motivations behind these

advertisements. Still, these perspectives only point out how advertisements "might" be

read by consumers, without including actual human voices and opinions.

     It is much more difficult to engage in textual analysis regarding bisexual and

transgender representation in advertising because unlike gay men, bisexual and

transgender men are almost completely absent from mainstream television

advertisements, and portrayals of bisexual and transgender individuals in

advertisements are almost entirely limited to depictions of bisexual women as

promiscuous and mocking depictions of transgender women (Tsai 2010). Tsai's (2010)

study took a rare critical focus on the ways in which bisexual and transgender

stereotypes operate in television advertisements and found that bisexual and transgender

characters are largely absent and when present, generally characterized in a very

stereotypical manner. Recent work has indicated that bisexual and transgender

representation has not increased or diversified since 2010 (Nölke 2017). Nölke's

analysis indicated an overall lack of diversity of LGBT individuals in advertising and

showed the ways in which the problems identified by scholars like Sender, Kates, and

Chasin might have changed in the time since their work was published, concluding that

"any portrayal whose appearance and lifestyle does not adhere to the 'dream consumer,'

image remains invisible," and that such an absence "raises the question of whether

LGBT imagery used currently in mainstream ads really appeals to the LGBT community," (2017, p. 243).

Studies that focus on textual analysis raise, but are unable to answer, the question of how LGBT individuals may feel about ads that are not inclusive of their identity. David Gudelunas criticized this reliance on textual analysis, arguing that people have too long relied on analyzing the text of LGBT advertisements without looking at the intentions and opinions of the individuals constructing the ads, offering a compelling reason to move beyond textual analysis (2013).

Perspectives of LGBT Consumers

Research that includes LGBT participants typically considers the perspective of LGBT consumers as a single group and generally does not include bisexual and transgender participants, but research has indicated that there may be some benefit in examining the varying perspectives of LGBT consumers (Gudelunas 2010; Nölke 2017; Oakenfull and Greenlee 2005; Oakenfull 2007; Oakenfull 2013; Tsai 2010; Tsai 2011; Tuten 2006; Um 2016). One study concluded that "lesbians appear to place more importance than do gay men on most LGBT-oriented corporate activities when evaluating a company's gay-friendliness," and suggested that gay men and lesbians should not be marketed to as a single, monolithic entity (Oakenfull 2013, p. 86). In a separate study, Oakenfull concluded that both gender and explicitness of gay identity played an important role in understanding how advertisements with explicit gay imagery were viewed, and concluded that the effect was stronger the more the respondent identified as gay but that "marketers that attempt to tap into this market must be aware of the impact of gender on the gay identity," (2007, p. 66). Limiting the focus

of one's research is necessary in any academic study, but as Nölke argued, "the fact that these identities are symbolically annihilated by the market should not be used as the reason for a comparable exclusion in academic literature," (2018). Oakenfull also noted "the importance of ascertaining knowledge on all groups within the LGBT umbrella," even as she justified her choice to study only gay men and lesbians (Oakenfull 2013, p. 79). There is still much work to be done in the study of LGBT advertising and including the voices of bisexual and transgender respondents is one way to move such research forward, by ensuring that every identity included in the acronym is beginning to be well-understood.

  To better understand the ways in which bisexual and transgender adults interact with LGBT advertising, the study used qualitative data analysis to give a voice to previously unrepresented individuals. This perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of the ways that LGBT consumers relate to and rationalize LGBT advertisements (Tsai 2011). Qualitative data creates a space for gay and lesbian consumers to offer their own perspectives and experiences and can work in concert with prior work that examines LGBT advertisements from a textual angle as well as studies that examine the perspectives of LGBT consumers but utilize quantitative rather than qualitative data (Gudelunas 2010).

Methods

Subject Recruitment

Participants were selected using purposive sampling from a variety of subject pools including contacts related to LGBT groups within the University of Oregon, personal connections, flyers, and recruitment in University classrooms as well as asking previous respondents to make any possible connections for potential interview subjects (Tsai 2011). Subjects were recruited in order to ensure the largest and most diverse possible recruitment pool, and were chosen based on enrollment or recent enrollment in University and LGBT identity. Subjects were only asked for specific age information if they were not currently enrolled in a university. The oldest graduated participant was 24 years old. Ultimately, three bisexual women, one pansexual woman, three transgender individuals, three lesbians, and three gay men were interviewed for the project (see Table 1). Participants were all enrolled in a university or recently graduated and were located in a variety of locations including Oregon, California, and New York. Participants were each assigned code names, which are indicated in the table below. The pansexual participant's data was excluded because her identity did not fit within the parameters initially outlined by the research, but future research could perhaps examine how the popularity of new identities may shape and change the way that we analyze LGBT populations.

Table 1

Participant names (changed for confidentiality) and LGBT identity.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	LGBT IDENTITY
Carla	Bisexual
Greta	Bisexual
Loretta	Bisexual
Ben	Trans
Kane	Trans
Manuel	Trans
Isa	Lesbian
Janet	Lesbian
Dana	Lesbian
Adam	Gay
Ethan	Gay
Fitz	Gay

Interview Methods

The interview structure and format were modeled on work done by Tsai (2011) and Gudelunas (2010) who used interviews (Tsai) and focus groups (Gudelunas) with LGBT participants and interpretive analysis to gain insight into LGBT consumers. The present study was conducted using structured, one-on-one interviews due to the small nature of the sample size and the difficulty of putting together focus groups. Interviews were conducted in person or over a video call if participants were too far away to interview in person and were recorded for later transcription. Each interview began with two questions designed to determine the individual's relationship to LGBT advertisements, and to make them comfortable with the interview process (see Appendix A).

Next, participants were shown two separate advertisements and asked to respond to several questions about each. Advertisements were selected to show two possible forms of LGBT advertising: one that was very inclusive and featured a variety of identities, and another that showed only one white gay couple. Although each advertisement was from a different category, both were services.

The first ad was an ad for Uber (https://vimeo.com/223241621), featuring trans individuals as well as many individuals of different ages and gender presentations (see Appendix B). Respondents were asked to describe their feelings towards this ad and were asked about the brand's stance on LGBT issues and what the brand could be doing to improve the participant's opinion of the brand. Next, participants were shown a second ad for Marriott hotels (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_NnEIkgCD4), intended to act as a stereotypical (and thus less inclusive) example of LGBT advertising (see Appendix B). The ad is centered around the idea of the "golden rule" (treating everybody how we would like to be treated), and features a variety of individuals of different races and ages. The ad featured only a single white gay couple. Participants were then asked the same set of questions as after the first ad, with follow-up questions depending on the nature of their answers or to allow them to elaborate on their responses. All participants were shown the same two ads, in the same order every time.

Participants were then asked if either of the advertisements was reflective of their lived experiences, and if anything could be shown that would make the ads better reflect their lived experiences. At this point in the interview the researcher was able to ask additional questions about the respondent's experiences with LGBT brands in general based on information brought up earlier in the interview to allow for a greater

15

diversity of responses (Tsai 2011). Respondents were asked if advertisements were reflective of their lived experiences and given an opportunity to elaborate on what might be included in an advertisement that would be more reflective of their lived experiences (Tsai 2011). Participants were also asked about brands that they perceived to be both particularly friendly and particularly unfriendly to LGBT individuals to gain an understanding of LGBT consumers' understanding of brand's views on LGBT issues. An open ended question ("Do you have anything else you want to add?") was used at the end to give participants the opportunity to discuss anything else they'd like to talk about.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher and then analyzed thematically by the researcher in order to understand main points of connection and diversion among individual participants and across identities. Interviews were first examined in their entirety to understand broader themes posited by individuals and then divided by question and analyzed based on identity group. Analysis was broken down thematically to understand common patterns that emerged across interviews. Themes were chosen based on commonalities noticed by the researcher during interviews and based on previously established hypotheses. Additional themes were also chosen based on examining the results of past qualitative studies and their own conclusions (Gudelunas 2010; Tsai 2011). Due to time and scope constraints, the primary researcher was the only person to analyze the results.

Results

Opinions on LGBT Advertising

Across any particular identity and across the entirety of the interview, respondents' understandings of LGBT advertisements were frequently nuanced. There was no clear consensus among participants on whether or not LGBT advertisements were harmful or beneficial or even a trend of personal opinions. Respondents often couched their opinions in nuanced language, acknowledging the broader societal importance of representation even as they expressed personal dissatisfaction with the content of the ads themselves. "I appreciate the effort, but it feels very forced, especially in American ads," said Greta, a bisexual woman. This kind of nuanced understanding seemed to stem mainly from the fact that many participants expressed a lack of strong feelings towards LGBT advertising in general. Greta went on to note "Unless it's like blatantly offensive I'm pretty neutral about it." Other participants echoed that same opinion or noted that they did not have particularly positive feelings towards LGBT advertisements, but that this was mostly a function of their general distrust of advertising in general. "I don't have a strong opinion on it as much as I generally don't like advertising, but I don't feel like there's anything specific to LGB advertising except that it's kind of a sometimes a breach of privacy for some people," said Manuel, a trans man.

Participants generally had positive feelings towards depictions of LGBT individuals in advertising, but frequently regarded such advertisements with a

significant degree of skepticism, questioned the motives of the brand creating the ad, and expressed a desire to not only be included as a means of creating "diversity." Participants also noted that they felt that they would have more positive feelings towards LGBT ads in general if they felt the brand had a reason for selling the ads to LGBT participants in particular, rather than just including LGBT people and symbols in the ad to broaden their audience or make themselves seem more diverse or progressive. Several participants noted that although they felt that LGBT individuals were added to advertisements to make them seem more "diverse," they ultimately found those representations alienating because they did not perceive themselves as being particularly "rainbow." This tension was evident in many of the interviews: participants expressed a desire to not be defined by their identity. "I think I'd be cool to just like…just like have it just like subtle. Not make it this big deal. Yeah, I don't know. Just less…Because it's not like every day of our lives is Pride, you know?" said Loretta, a bisexual woman. There was no uniform consensus on LGBT advertising from any particular identity, nor was there any distinction noticed between responses of gay and lesbian individuals versus bisexual and transgender individuals, instead, opinions were based more on lived experiences and importance of identity in their lives.

Across the board, many participants expressed that neither advertisement offered an accurate portrayal of their lived experiences. Many participants noted that although they were pleased about or supportive of both of the ads shown, they did not feel that any aspect of the advertisement was speaking to them specifically. Of those who did feel as though one or both of the ads were reflective of their lived experiences, the majority (including one gay, one bi, and one trans participant) felt that the second ad,

which was specifically chosen because of the fact that it showed only a single white gay male couple, was generally more reflective of their lived experiences than the first ad which included a much wider variety of identities. Only a single bisexual participant found that the first ad (the one chosen for its greater diversity of representation) was reflective of her lived experiences. Participants who identified more with the second ad stressed that the second ad reflected a more normal, grounded reality, and perhaps one less focused on the loudest expression of LGBT identity. Loretta noted that "I think the second one (the ad for Marriott) was more closer to my experience just in the sense that you want people to just be accepted and seamless and inclusive and not have it be a big deal." This centrality of identity was important to several participants, who suggested that its loud and vibrant nature was an important representation of queer identity, and overall acceptable, even if it was not something that these participants personally identified with. Participants generally expressed a desire for normalcy and inclusion, and many participants stated that one of the benefits of LGBT advertising for them was indeed the fact that LGBT advertising normalized LGBT lifestyles and behavior. "I think that it's positive because it allows us to like visualize our lives in normal society and make us feel comfortable," said Foster, a gay man.

The first advertisement (Uber) was chosen specifically for its inclusivity, but many participants were more concerned with the advertisement's depiction of Pride as an event, using their own experiences with Pride as well as their associations of what Pride meant to them as a measuring stick. The ad was chosen because it featured a variety of participants of ages and races and featuring several trans or gender-nonconforming individuals, and participants praised it for its diversity and

19

inclusiveness. "There was a lot of, I'm saying it loosely, there was a good variety of

LGBTQA+ people. At least that you could assume from just their pictures and what

they see," said Jane, a lesbian. But participants had varying interpretations of whether

the Pride event felt like an accurate portrayal of the experience of going to a Pride

parade, with some expressing that the ad was a close approximation of the feeling of

attending Pride while others said that the ad was nothing like the experience of

attending. The advertisement's choice to center mainly around Pride month became a

theme of concern for some participants. Kane, a trans man, noted that for him, an

important question to consider when assessing whether he liked an advertisement was to

ask, "Is it being aimed at LGBT individuals primarily during June, July, Pride month,

just to kind of 'hey, diversity?' Or is it something that's a genuinely useful product that

needs to be aimed at the LGBT community?" This theme of the importance of diversity

appeared frequently in participants' responses. Participants noted that not only did they

want to see greater diversity within advertisements aimed at LGBT individuals, but they

also did not want to feel that inclusion of LGBT individuals in advertisements was

simply a mechanism for a company trying to cultivate a reputation of being diverse.

  Bisexual, lesbian and gay participants all stressed that they would like to see a

more seamless integration of LGBT stories and individuals into advertisements. Greta

noted that "I feel like when [LGBT representation] does appear in ads it's meant to be a

whole thing like 'oh look we're LGBT friendly.' It's not as integrated into society as I'd

like it to be." Greta's words echoed a similar sentiment of many participants who said

that they wished that LGBT advertisements were more capable of normalizing LGBT

experiences, and that such ads could seamlessly integrate visible same sex relationships

in the same way that they included heterosexual relationships. Such desire was made more apparent when participants compared the two ads: Loretta, a bi woman, noted that she didn't like that the first ad, which featured a depiction of a Pride parade, sensationalized gay life. "I feel like it makes it so much less normalized, like it's like a circus, it's like a festival. It's this rainbow array, that's what it is to be, you know LGBTQ and a lot of it is just living a normal life and a lot of people who just want to live a normal life." This was contrasted sharply with the themes of the second ad, which featured only a brief scene of a gay couple. Ethan, a gay man, noted that the casual representation of gay couples was a benefit of the ad. "There was like a same sex couple in that ad, but I did I guess kind of like that it wasn't focused just around that." Jane, a lesbian, suggested that although visual representation was important, it wasn't taking the issue far enough. "…it's nice to see that visual representation in all of them being like 'hey, this is normal,' we need to start normalizing it, but also I feel like the ads don't…That's all it is. It's all like visual okay…" Even within the same response, participants noted that they had conflicting feelings towards the same advertisements.

Overall, participants were unlikely to express improved feelings towards the brand, regardless of orientation. Neither bisexual nor transgender participants were likely to express an improved perception of any brand, even after seeing an advertisement featuring transgender individuals. Similarly, trans participants were not more likely to express an overall negative opinion of LGBT advertising than bisexual, lesbian, or gay participants, once again suggesting that responses have little to do with identity. General apathy (or even slight negative feelings) toward brands was consistent across respondents, but results may also have been affected by the fact that in several

instances, participants failed to recognize the brand even after watching the advertisement. "I barely remember them. It's like hotels…Spring….field suites. Oh well," said Ben, a trans participant. Other participants noted that they were unsure as to the purpose or meaning of the ad until the very end. "Well again, like in terms of the branding perspective. I didn't know what it was for until the very end. Not even entirely sure what it was for. Was it Foursquare?" said Greta, a bisexual woman.

Brand Social Responsibility

Participants generally lacked awareness about brands' views on LGBT issues. Some participants had a vague knowledge of a brand's connection to certain anti-LGBT groups or about the brand's founders, but it was rarely certain or specific. "I've stayed at Marriott. They're fine. I imagine that the CEOs and board of directors are probably awful people but, you know. I think the Marriott hotels are just fine," said Adam, a gay man. When pressed to name brands that either were particularly friendly or particularly unfriendly towards LGBT individuals, most participants were unable to identify a brand they deemed unfriendly other than Chick-fil-a, a fast food company which gained attention for its owners' donations to anti-LGBT groups. More cynical participants said that they generally assumed that all brands were being controlled by individuals whose values did not align with their own. Jane, a lesbian, noted that identifying brands that were unfriendly to LGBT individuals was difficult because it was hard to know how those in charge of the company felt about LGBT advertising. "Well, the problem is a lot of big businesses are funded by Christian organizations that are anti-LGBTQA+ so then it's like maybe the organization as a whole, but they're being funded by views. So technically, they have to be because they're connected to these organizations." Ethan, a

gay man, noted that while he was skeptical of brands' reasoning behind supporting LGBT people, overall he generally believed that brands were friendly towards LGBT individuals unless he heard otherwise. "And maybe that's just a way that they're saying they support LGBT people, which might surprise me, might surprise me like 'oh, I didn't know this company was a supporter of LGBT people!' but obviously I kind of assume that unless I hear otherwise." Participants were unlikely to have any prior knowledge on a brand's status on LGBT individuals before being asked about it in the interview, and few participants expressed any clear prior knowledge of a brand's stance on LGBT issues.

Participants generally felt that their opinion on the brand was not significantly swayed by depictions of queerness, instead, many of them cited a desire for brands to speak more candidly about the real life problems that LGBT individuals face. Isa said "I mean, it's nice and I think it does make me feel better about Uber the brand. But it also makes me wonder, what else are they doing or is this just a commercial?" Participants frequently suggested evidence of brands donating to LGBT causes as a potential way for brands to regain some credibility within the LGBT community. "And I guess yeah, maybe put their money where their mouth is, you know? If they are making these ads specifically for LGBT people or just promoting the LGBT community, then maybe they should, you know, put some money towards that if they don't already." Additionally, Greta, a bisexual participant and Dana, a lesbian participant, both noted that they would like to see the inclusion of more transgender individuals in LGBT advertisements, not for their own sake but simply because they wanted to see representation of a broader subsection of the community in such advertisements. ""I want to see trans people not in

their own stereotype, you know? Like butch trans people who identify as women are equally as valid as trans women who are passing, having more diversity within the same group would be great," said Greta. Dana also noted that the rainbow, despite being a relatively inclusive symbol for the LGBT community, lacked nuance or diversity when used to represent the LGBT community. "I feel like so heavily always rainbow stuff and it's like we never see like: there's no like trans visibility, there's no bisexual visibility."

Discussion/Conclusion

Neither bisexual nor transgender participants held markedly different opinions on any LGBT advertisements than lesbian and gay participants. This is in line with several prior studies which indicated that lesbian and gay participants were likely to have similar opinions regarding LGBT advertisements (Gudelunas 2010; Tsai 2011). The aim of this study was to understand how different identities viewed LGBT advertisements, but ultimately it became clear that opinions on LGBT advertisements varied on a far more individual basis. Participants judged advertisements on a myriad of factors including gender identity, importance of gay identity, personal history with advertising and with the brand in particular, and personal values regarding the importance of diverse representation in media. Bisexual and transgender participants did not display a unified point of view with their own identity group or any other identity group. This could be a limitation of the data: all bisexual participants identified as women and all transgender participants were transmasculine, meaning that potential gender differences within identity groups were not accurately reflected.

Despite the fact most participants did not feel as though the advertisements they were shown were reflective of their lived experiences, participants generally found a way to rationalize such advertisements as being at least in some way positive for the community. Participants frequently expressed tempered satisfaction at the brand's willingness to include LGBT people or in the normalization of LGBT experiences. Such results echo past work that has indicated that younger LGBT participants are more likely to be critical of LGBT representation in advertisements (Gudelunas 2010). What

complicates these results however, is the notion that even advertisements that are cast and written to showcase diversity are failing to persuade younger LGBT consumers, and in fact may be less appealing than more traditional, less diverse ads. Participants echoed the results of past studies that found that some LGBT participants express a desire for advertisements with assimilationist themes that eschew distinctive representations of the gay community in favor of ones that normalize and homogenize gay relationships, but participants also expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as LGBT advertisements that were not diverse enough (Tsai 2011). Such contradictions indicate a potential divide within the community: it seems that younger LGBT consumers may no longer be willing to accept any representation as positive representation, but what exactly they are looking for seems to vary considerably from person to person.

When asked what they wanted to see in LGBT advertisements, participants said they wanted to see ads that showed brands' commitment to supporting the LGBT community. Respondents said financial support would be the clearest and easiest option, but this could also be accounted for by the short amount of time that participants had to produce a solution to the problems that they identified. Many participants wanted to see tangible financial support for the LGBT community in the form of tactics such as donations to LGBT charity organizations, but participants also offered suggestions such as creating advertisements that addressed more specific problems that LGBT consumers face in their daily lives, and greater inclusion of certain specific LGBT identities in advertisements. More than any other suggestion, participants said that the best way to make the ad relatable was to show evidence of real attempts to help the community.

Such behavior on the part of brands falls under the concept of "gay friendliness," which indicates that "the brand/company is proactive in addressing the needs of gays, just as suggesting that a brand is environment-friendly implies that the brand is proactive in taking steps to protect the environment," (Tuten 2006, p. 80). Such activities are generally categorized as separate from advertising to LGBT consumers when evaluated with other "gay friendly" activities such as domestic partner benefits, and yet participants repeatedly expressed that seeing evidence of financial support would be the best way to convince them that brands were not simply attempting to exploit the LBGT community (Oakenfull 2013). Combining popular metrics of gay-friendliness by promoting a brand's financial support of gay causes and organizations through advertising to gay consumers in mainstream media may help to alleviate some of the critiques that brands are simply advertising to LGBT people as a way to increase their audiences and that brands are not truly supportive of LGBT individuals (Oakenfull 2013).

Some participants simply wanted to see normalized portrayals of LGBT lives. These participants didn't necessarily require that brands directly donate money, but they wanted to see LGBT lives and problems represented as they truly were. Things like allowing public displays of affection in depictions of LGBT consumers, or acknowledging the valid fears and concerns such as harassment and discrimination that LGBT individuals face when navigating daily life, is a potential avenue for brands who are looking to demonstrate support for LGBT consumers. Such actions are more subtle, and may require more finesse than simple representation through advertising on the part of brands, as there is more room to alienate consumers by creating more specific

depictions. At the same time, these ads have the potential to normalize LGBT lives in a way that simple financial support does not. Participants suggested actions as simple as reiterating that LGBT couples are welcome to stay in a hotel would improve their image of the brand overall. Such actions do not require grand gestures of support, but instead require that brands acknowledge LGBT consumers as individuals with complex lives and problems.

Because of the diversity of desires and responses on the part of participants, brands might benefit from approaching different LGBT audiences differently. Prior work has suggested a potential benefit in targeting lesbian and gay consumers separately because of the differences in lifestyles between lesbian and gay consumers, such as lesbians having on average a lower income and a higher likelihood of having children (Lukenbill 2000; Oakenfull 2007). Bisexual and transgender individuals are disproportionately economically disadvantaged, indicating that if lesbian and gay consumers should be considered differently due to the difference in their economic positions, then perhaps bisexual and transgender consumers should also be targeted as their own identity groups (Hollibaugh and Weiss 2015). Despite this, the conclusions of this study, much like other qualitative studies, have not found significant differences among the ways that LGBT consumers of different orientations perceive and rationalize the effects of LGBT advertisements. To better understand why different consumers have different responses to LGBT advertisements, an intersectional approach may be beneficial: LGBT people of color in general suffer greater rates of harassment and poverty than their white counterparts and thus their responses to advertisements aimed at LGBT individuals may differ (Hollibaugh and Weiss 2015). In light of this, we must

consider that perhaps it is not LGBT identity that is the primary motivating factor in determining perceptions of advertisements, but instead other factors such as gender and race that may be playing a stronger part in determining how certain individuals are likely to feel about advertisements (Chasin 2001, Sender 2004). Brands are never going to reach every LGBT individual, and attempting to do so is a futile pursuit. Instead, brands will likely have the best chance of reaching a majority of LGBT consumers by creating advertising that normalizes LGBT lives and experiences, speaking to the wide variety of participants who said they wanted to see such representation, not just in terms of race and gender, but also in terms of sexuality. Representing diverse populations of LGBT individuals in advertisements, especially marginalized populations that may not have traditionally received much attention on the part of advertisers, may help reach a greater percentage of LGBT consumers, even if those same LGBT consumers do not see themselves directly represented in these advertisements.

While the results of this study indicate that LGBT advertisements do not effectively target bisexual and transgender participants, it would be more accurate to say that the results of this study indicate that LGBT advertisements may not be effectively targeting college-aged LGBT individuals of any orientation. Participants were more likely to express skepticism towards brands' motives in creating LGBT advertisements, and indicated that they would much rather see evidence of financial support of the LGBT community. Such evidence echoes prior qualitative research, which has indicated that although older LGBT consumers are more likely to see any representation as a positive show of support for the LGBT community, younger LGBT individuals are less likely to be grateful for representation, and more likely to want companies to court their

loyalty (Gudelunas 2010). Participants did not necessarily reference the idea of gay consumers as a "dream market," but some still expressed a desire to see advertising that reflected an assimilationist narrative that downplayed gay identity (Tsai 2011). Participants also expressed a desire to see brands deal directly with issues that the LGBT community faces, tying the ads to the LGBT community in particular and showing real commitment to understanding and working against the problems that LGBT individuals face in society.

The results of this study indicate that LGBT consumers are not entirely against being hailed by brands, and some participants stated that they saw normalization in advertising as a pathway to social assimilation. That many participants may not have felt particularly compelled by either of the ads shown in the study may indicate a lack of effective advertising, but two ads do not account for all possible reactions. Tsai (2011) noted that "Minority consumers walk a fine line between seeking subcultural legitimation and securing social inclusion," arguing that perhaps LGBT consumers embrace assimilationist narratives and stereotypes to protect themselves and gain social capital in an intolerant society even as they advocate for diverse and inclusive advertising (p. 94). The results of this study echo this conflict, and show how it can exist on both an individual and group basis. Some participants were only interested assimilationist narratives and found overt displays of difference off-putting, while others felt that diversity and inclusion should be the only goals of such advertising.

Despite heavy critique of assimilationist narratives in the literature, the popularity of these narratives with respondents highlights the conflict in understanding consumer responses to LGBT ads (Chasin 2001, Kates 1999, Sender 2004). It is

potentially problematic to assume that the average LGBT consumer will hold

advertising to a higher standard of inclusivity or political correctness than a

heterosexual consumer. But while LGBT consumers in the past may have rationalized

and legitimized problematic portrayals in order to secure acceptance, such tactics are

increasingly unnecessary as LGBT individuals gain political and social capital (Tsai

2011; Nölke 2017). It that the results of the study echo both the generational divide

present in Gudelunas' (2010) study and the resistance by LGBT consumers against an

embattled existence that Tsai's (2011) study indicates. Additionally, the results do not

have a clear breakdown based on sexuality but instead must be considered in the light of

individual experiences and a variety of life factors.

   For practitioners hoping to target the LGBT market in the future, the results of

this study could be the first step towards creating more effective and ultimately more

ethical advertising. Participants held complex feelings towards LGBT advertising, but

many expressed either neutral or positive feelings towards the idea of LGBT

advertising, indicating that there is potentially room for marketers to effectively target

an audience that is not currently being served. Marketers have long attempted to target

the LGBT market through the depiction of mostly attractive, white gay men and it

seems as though LGBT consumers have not only noticed this approach, but are actively

critical of it (Sender 2004). As Tsai (2011) noted, participants may want to see

themselves included seamlessly into LGBT ads, but they may also want to have brands

acknowledge the very real and imperfect reality that many LGBT individuals currently

face (Hollibaugh and Weiss 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

This study is small, and thus perhaps not generalizable to the entirety of the LGBT community, but such qualitative data provides valuable insight into the ways that college-aged LGBT individuals relate to and react to ads. The purpose of the study was to include bisexual and transgender voices who have largely been excluded from prior research. The present study did not find any significant differences in the way that bisexual and transgender individuals relate to advertisements, and limiting factors such as the small sample size and the fact that the study did not include transgender women or bisexual men could play a role. Similarly, choosing to survey only those who fell under the acronym "LGBT" excluded respondents who identified as "queer" or "pansexual" or in other ways experienced same sex attraction. Future research should aim not only to include a broader diversity of participants within the LGBT acronym, but also potentially work to include those whose self-identification does not fit perfectly within this binary. In including these voices in future studies, perhaps a more complete understanding of the ways in which LGBT individuals engage with LGBT advertising can begin to be understood.

The present work provides an entry into understanding the ways that young bisexual and transgender individuals relate to advertisements, but the results of the current study indicate that there is still much more to be done to fully understand how LGBT identity impacts advertising. The present study did not find any specific differences in the way that bisexual and transgender individuals approached advertisements in relation to lesbian and gay participants, but further research should be

done to better understand how the importance of gay identity functions among different demographic groups (Oakenfull 2007). Research could examine the role of race, gender identity, socioeconomic status, age, and gay identity to determine how different LGBT consumers respond to different LGBT advertisements and in turn create advertising that can more effectively target LGBT consumers. Further research could also be done to determine the importance of LGBT representation that is not reflective of the viewer's identity group. Several studies in the past have suggested that gay and lesbian consumers should be advertised to using separate imagery, but some participants in the present study noted that they would like to see greater bisexual or transgender representation, even if they themselves were not bisexual or transgender (Oakenfull and Greenlee 2005, Oakenfull 2007). Future work could look to understand whether certain LGBT identities might react more favorably to positive portrayals of identities that are not their own but represent more marginalized members of the community. Finally, participants professed specific opinions on certain ads, but many could not name brands that were supportive of LGBT causes, indicating that it might be beneficial from a practitioner's perspective to attempt to understand whether LGBT consumers, particularly younger LGBT consumers, take LGBT supportiveness into account when making purchasing decisions.

To fully understand the ways in which LGBT consumer responses to LGBT advertisements are changing in light of a changing world, further work must be done. The present study provides several important insights to the way that LGBT individuals are currently interacting with LGBT ads, but it is only a small piece of the full picture. As the world grows more tolerant of LGBT individuals, and certain LGBT individuals

move closer to assimilation, views and preferences for LGBT advertisements are changing as well. LGBT consumers are no longer forced to interact with brands and advertisements as a single embattled unit, but instead as a diverse community of individuals with wildly varying lives and experiences. Given this changing landscape, brands and practitioners must reexamine the ways in which they are attempting to reach LGBT consumers and to understand how their brands fit into this new world.
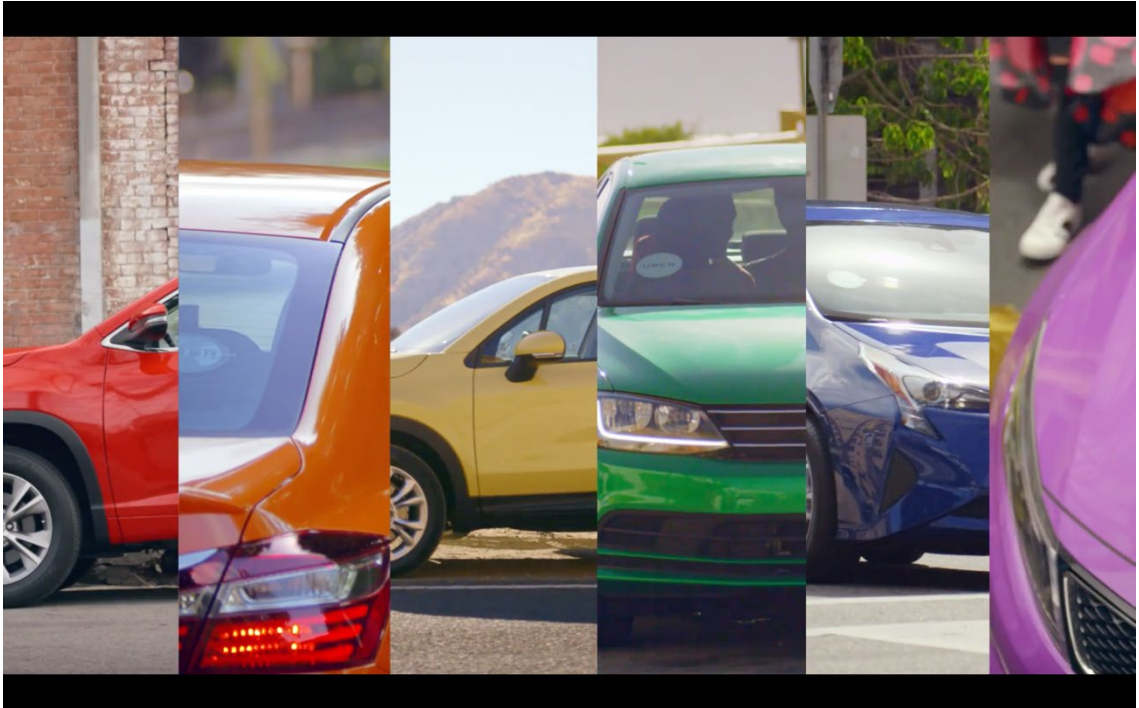
Appendix A

Questions asked during the interview

- How do you feel about advertising aimed at LGBT individuals in general?

- Do you have strong feelings about LGBT advertising?

- Do you notice any trends or common themes in such advertisements?

- What did you think of the first ad? How do you feel about the brand after watching that ad?

- What could the brand do to make you like it more?

- What would you use instead of the brand?

- Do you know if the brand has any views on LGBT issues?

- What would have to be in the ad to make it LGBT friendly?

- What did you think of the second ad? How do you feel about the brand after watching that ad?

- What could the brand do to make you like it more?

- What would you use instead of the brand?

- Do you know if the brand has any views on LGBT issues?

- What would have to be in the ad to make it LGBT friendly?

- Do you feel either of the ads were reflective of your experiences as an LGBT person?

- What else would you like to see? What would show more of your lived experiences?

- Brands that are being super LGBT friendly?

- Brands that are super unfriendly to LGBT individuals?

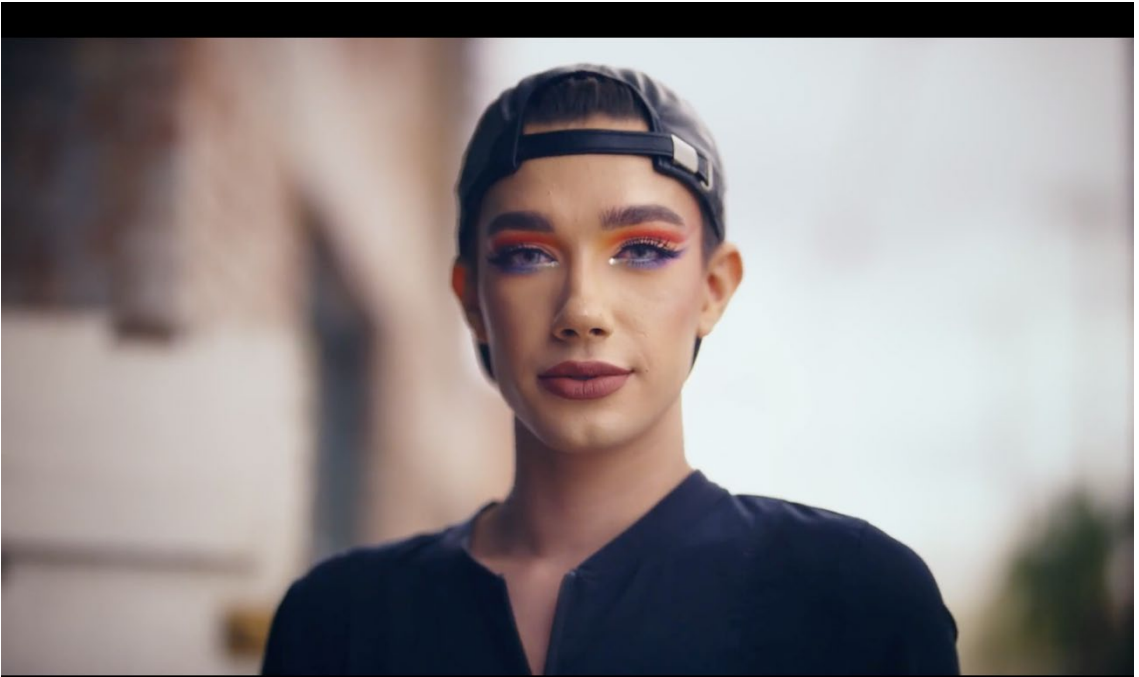- Do you have anything else you want to add?

Appendix B

Screenshots of Advertisements Shown

Uber: Ride with Pride

Marriott: The Golden Rule

Bibliography

Badgett, M. (2001). Money, myths and change: The economic lives of gay men and women. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Branchik, B. (2002) Out in the market: A history of the gay market segment in the United States. Journal of Macromarketing, 22(1), 86-97.

Chasin, A. (2000). Selling out : The gay and lesbian movement goes to market. New York: St. Martins Press.

DEmilio, J. (1983). Sexual politics, sexual communities : The making of a homosexual minority in the United States, 1940-1970. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

United States Department of Commerce (1966). A guide to negro marketing information. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office.

Gudelunas, D. (2011). Consumer myths and the gay men and women who believe them: A qualitative look at movements and markets. Psychology and Marketing, 28(1), 53-68.

Gudelunas, D. (2013). Sexual minorities as advertising gatekeepers. In Natalie T. J. Tindall & Richard D. Waters (Eds.), Coming out of the closet (73-89). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Gross, L. (2001). Up from invisibility: Lesbians, gay men, and the media in America. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hollibaugh, A., & Weiss, M. (2015). Queer Precarity and the Myth of Gay Affluence. New Labor Forum, 24(3), 18-27.

Kates, S. (1999). Making the Ad Perfectly Queer: Marketing "Normality" to the Gay Mens Community? Journal of Advertising, 28(1), 25-37.

Lukenbill, G. (1999). Untold millions : Secret truths about marketing to gay and lesbian consumers (2nd ed., Haworth gay & lesbian studies). New York: Harrington Park Press.

Nölke, A. (2018) Making Diversity Conform? An Intersectional, Longitudinal Analysis of LGBT-Specific Mainstream Media Advertisements, Journal of Homosexuality, 65(2), 224-255.

Oakenfull, G. (2007). Effects of gay identity, gender and explicitness of advertising imagery on gay responses to advertising. Journal of Homosexuality, 53(4), 49-69.

Oakenfull, G. (2013). What Matters: Factors Influencing Gay Consumers' Evaluations of "Gay-Friendly" Corporate Activities. Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 32, 79.

Oakenfull, G., & Greenlee, T. (2005). Queer eye for a gay guy: Using market-specific symbols in advertising to attract gay consumers without alienating the mainstream. Psychology and Marketing, 22(5), 421-439.

Peñazola, L. (1996) We're Here, We're Queer and We're Going Shopping! A Critical Perspective on the Accommodation of Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Marketplace. Gays, Lesbians, and Consumer Behavior: Theory, Practice, and Research Issues in Marketing (9-41). New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.

Smith, W. R. (1956). Product differentiation and market segmentation as alternative marketing strategies. Journal of marketing, 21(1), 3-8.

Sender, K. (2004). Business, not politics the making of the gay market (Between Men~Between Women: Lesbian and Gay Studies). New York: Columbia University Press.

Tsai, W. (2010) "Assimilating the Queers: Representations of Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexual, and Transgender People in Mainstream Advertising." Advertising & Society Review 11(1).

Tsai, W. (2011). How minority consumers use targeted advertising as pathways to self-empowerment: Gay mens and lesbians reading of out -of-the-closet advertising. Journal of Advertising, 40(3), 85-97.

Tuten, T. (2006). Exploring the Importance of Gay-friendliness and its Socialization Influences. Journal of Marketing Communications, 12(2), 79-94.

Um, N. (2014) Does gay-themed advertising haunt your brand? International Journal of Advertising 33(4) 811-832.

Um, N. (2016) Consumers' Responses to Implicit and Explicit Gay-Themed Advertising in Gay vs. Mainstream Media. Journal of Promotion Management, 22(3), 461-477.

Um, N. et al. (2015) Symbols or icons in gay-themed ads: How to target gay audience. Journal of Marketing Communications, 21(6), 393-407.